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ABSTRACT

A study investigated (1) the nature of black student involvement in and commitment to the campaign of Jesse Jackson for the presidency, (2) the nature of student attitudes toward the campaign, and (3) the relationship among student media use, attitudes, knowledge, and involvement in the campaign. Black students in 20 undergraduate speech classes completed questionnaires eliciting information about their media use, attitudes toward Jesse Jackson, and the campaign in general. Results indicated that students preferred television over newspapers as information sources, with 52% identifying themselves as light readers and only 20% describing themselves as light television viewers. Data also showed that student interest in the Jackson campaign was high, and that attitudes toward him were not rigidly predetermined on the basis of identification with an articulate, attractive black politician. There was, however, considerable student uncertainty about Jackson's position on four campaign issues, which is the possible explanation for the failure to find any relationship between media use and the acceptance or rejection of propositions regarding his position on the issues. (The instrument used in the survey is appended.) (FL)

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WATCH JESSE RUN AND TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE: A FIRST LOOK AT STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE JESSE JACKSON PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY

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WATCH JESSE RUN AND TELL ME WHAT YOU SEE: A FIRST LOOK AT STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF JESSE JACKSON'S CANDIDACY

Because of the overwhelmingly important role of the mass media plays in the American political process, the Jesse Jackson campaign for the United States presidency signals a landmark point in the history of mainstream American politics. Since the reconstruction period, blacks have made several attempts to run candidates and to form independent political parties like the National Liberal Party, the Negro American Political League, the Afro-American Council, the Colored-American Party and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and others, (Ofari, 1984; Allen, 1969). Until recently blacks were hesistant to run for office as members of a traditional political party like the Democratic party. And in either mainstream or idependent politics black candidates were plagued with limited campaign funds, and a lack of media support, (Cayton and Drake, 1945).

The last few decades of the twentieth century have heralded a "more assertive" political consciousness among blacks. Proof of this was crystallized in the emergence of the Jackson candidacy. Contemporary interest in the Jackson campaign was high and widespread especially after the "Goodman", "Hymie" and "Farrakhan" issues and after Jackson's respectable showing in the New York and Pennsylvania primaries. Proof of the significance and importance of the campaign also lies in the recent statement made by political historian, Theodore White, that American politics will "never be the same" after Jesse Jackson.

Scholars and journalists predict that Jackson may turn out to be a "president maker" because of his command of a large segment of the black vote. According to Robert C. Smith and Joseph McCormick (1984) "Jesse

Jackson's campaign for the presidency and his political views are in harmony with the 85 percent of black American voters who respond to domestic and foreign issues in a liberal-left way." And it is this black vote which can be a decisive factor in a presidential election year. According to a recent report from the Joint Center for Political Studies (Cavanagh, 1984) the black vote was partially responsible for the nomination of three recent presidential candidates and the successful election of two recent presidents. Cavanaugh goes on to report that "Over the past decade the most visible sign of black political progress has been the steady increase in the number of black office holders elected across the country.... The number of black elected officials has increased from 1,469 in 1970 to 5,606 in 1983." The recent successful campaign of black candidates in mayoral races in Detroit, Chicago, Atlanta, Newark, Washington, Los Angeles and Philadelphia further demonstrates the important contribution of the black electorate in these cities.

Jesse Jackson's candidacy must be viewed within the context of the black electorate in America, their culture, myths, values, concerns and priorities. It must also be viewed in relation to Jackson's own personal charismatic style and personality. Jackson's political friends as well as his political enemies agree that he is a gifted orator. Along with Muslim Minister Louis Farrakhan millions of blacks have come to view Jackson and his campaign in larger than life "messianic" terms.

According to Charles Larson (1983) this American myth of the "messiah" has roots deep in American soil. He explains that whenever large groups of people perceive that they are confronted with adversity they look for a "messianic" leader or figure to rescue them and to help reverse their circumstances. Jackson's deep roots in the civil rights movement, his

close association with Martin Luther King, Jr. (a highly charismatic leader of the civil rights movement) and his flamboyance and gifted speaking ability made him the logical choice for the role of "savior" for the "dispossessed and downtrodden" in the 1984 presidential campaign drama.

THE MEDIA'S ROLE:

Scholars have observed that the media play a key role in the production and transmission of scenes from the political drama of a presidential campaign. Graber (1980) suggests that what the media say about the candidates becomes the information base for decision making by the electorate. While she agrees that the media highlight presidential qualities relative to a candidate's "personality and "character" as well as his competence to perform presidential tasks, she goes on to say that over the years candidates were most frequently "assessed in terms of their trustworthiness, strength of character and compassion (p. 158)." Thus, the critic and student of media coverage of Jackson's campaign would expect substanial emphasis to be given over to Jackson's personal qualities and character. One would also expect this emphasis to be reflected in the perception of the electorate for which he has the widest appeal, the black electorate. Jackson's success among the black electorate in major eastern cities argues against the negative effects of media portrayals of the "Hymie" question and the "Farrakhan issue." In other words, supporters of Jackson's candidacy appear at first glance to be highly resistant to negative media portrayals.

In addition to his overwhelming popularity among blacks, Jackson has also proven he has a special appeal to young voters. A Washington Post article in November 1983 demonstrates Jackson's appeal to and concern for the young voter. Jackson appeared before Black, Hispanic and White college students at the University of Texas at Austin, a "big predominantly white

school in the heart of the conservative southwest." The reporter writes that before Jackson's arrival "students pressed their noses to the glass for two hours waiting." He goes on to say that this situation represented "one of those small magical moments that touch a presidential campaign" and speaks "volumes about where the campaign is headed (Taylor, 1983)." This kind of example suggests that Jackson's campaign may have significance for youth as well as for the minorities and the oppressed.

AGENDA SETTING AND POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION:

To study perceptions of the Jackson candidacy by blacks and young people requires that we review the literature on agenda setting and political socialization. This research examines the direct and indirect nature of the effects of media on young people's perceptions of political candidates and political issues. Clearly, much of the research reveals some relationships, although often the effects are seen to be mediated by events or circumstances in the lives of the subjects.

Research on political socialization examines the influence of the media throughout the entire lifespan of the individual. McCombs (1972) argues that media agenda setting research "considered in terms of long term cognitive change could be a fruitful approach to the study of political socialization."

Chaffee (1970) concluded that media use like voting had an incremental effect on young people's knowledge during a political campaign. In other words, "high media use during a given campaign predicted a large relative future gain in knowledge better that it explained current knowledge." This observation, that media use plays a key role in cognitive and perceptual development of individuals is supported by Graber's research on the relationship of media use to learning (1980). Her research, calls

to the important distinction between the effects associated with television and those associated with newspapers, that there is great similarity between media users' knowledge of candidates and campaigns and election information provided by the media. And this similarity is greatest for people who use the media most and who rely most heavily on newspapers. Another study (Jackson-Beeck, 1979) contends that communication agents or media play an independent role in the political socialization of young people. Relative to subgroup variations, her findings support the notion of differential effects of television and newspapers. For those young people from "relatively disadvantaged home environments TV was a negative antecedent of information and interests, but newspaper exposure was exceptionally positive, suggesting a compensatory function of newspapers with this subgroup." On the other hand, "children from better backgrounds were not significantly affected either way by mass media exposure." This study, however, underscored the overall importance of newspaper reading for young people's political socialization.

In another study of young people who are first time voters, O'Keefe and Liu (1980) raised similar questions about the role of interpersonal and mass communication in the political socialization of adolescents. When specifically examining the age variable, O'Keefe and Liu found that communication related variables affect the voting dispositions of younger first-time voters more than older ones, "for whom other factors such as previous election experiences" were more significant.

Clearly, the research supports the notion that media has an impact on the knowledge, interests and perceptions of young people and first time voters through a process of political socialization.

This study on media agenda setting and black college student's perceptions of the Jesse Jackson candidacy involves a convergence of

research on to black voter perceptions, black use of the mass media, Black involvement in the political process, the political socialization of young people and media agenda setting. It is expected that these student's perceptions are related to their use of the media but it is also expected that the use of different media will be reflected in variance in student knowledge as well as in their evaluation of the Jackson candidacy.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The study raises and attempts to answer the following research questions: (1) What is the nature of student involvement in and commitment to the Jackson campaign; (2) What is the nature of student attitudes toward Jackson's candidacy and (3) What is the relationship between student media use, attitudes, knowledge and involvement in the Jackson campaign?

THE STUDY

SAMPLE:

During the first week of February, 1984, survey instruments were distributed in 20 undergraduate speech classes at Howard University, a predominantly black institution in Washington, D.C. The survey was identified as being part of a larger project studying the Jesse Jackson campaign. Students were free to retain the questionnaire if they did not wish to participate, and there was no form of individually identifiable information gathered in the process. Three hundred and sixteen completed questionnaires were received in this initial sample.

In the first week of April, surveys were again distributed in the same undergraduate speech classes. Because it was nearing the end of the semester and many classes were involved in oral presentations, several teaching assistants failed to distribute questionnaires during the assigned period. Two hundred and eleven completed questionnaires were received from this second sample period.

Approximately 67% of the sample was female, with nearly 70% of the sample entrolled in their first two years of college. Thirty-eight percent of the respondents were business majors, with only 13.3% of the them in physical sciences. A very high proportion of the sample (82%) reported that they intended to vote in the November election. Only 5.4% reported having no interest in the campaign, but more 25% of those responding indicated that they had some degree of involvement in the Jackson campaign.

When asked about their media use, respondents indicated a preference for television over newspapers with 52% identifying themselves as being "light" readers, whereas only 20% of the respondents described their television newsviewing as "light". When asked to identify their daily paper, The Washington Post was the most popular (75%), with the Washington Times, a more conservative alternative published by the Reverend Sun Young Moon's organization, being identified by only 4.7%. USA Today, the multi-colored tabloid from Gannett was read by 7% of the sample while a similar proportion read the New York Times.

There was no significant change in the basic characteristics of the sample between the February and April surveys. That is, there were no significant differences in the proportion of women, various grade levels, interest or involvement in the campaign. There was however, a significant decrease in the proportion of the sample reporting USA Today as their daily newspaper.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE JACKSON CAMPAIGN:

Respondents were asked to evaluate 15 assertions about Jesse Jackson and the campaign (see Appendix A). Their responses were measured by a Likert-type scale ranging in five intervals from Agree Very Strongly (scored as 5) to Disagree Very Strongly (scored as 1). Table One presents the means for

each assertion as computed for each sample period. T-tests were performed as an estimate of the significance of the change which occured during the period of primary elections.

ABOUT THE CANDIDATE:

Fifty-three percent of the respondents in the first survey agreed that Jackson was honest, but a fairly large proportion (38%) reported that they were unsure. This proportion changed little over the two months of primaries. A somewhat more dramatic change was observed with regard to perceptions of Jackson's intelligence. In February, 43% of the respondents reported agreement with the assertion that Jackson was the most intelligent candidate. By April, fully 60% reported agreement ($t = 4.25$, $p = .000$). A similar change was observed with regard to respondent perceptions of Jackson's relative independence. By April, there had been a 12% increase in the proportion agreeing that Jackson was the most independent candidate ($t = 2.83$, $p = .005$).

Respondents tended to agree that Jackson was articulate (77%) and knowledgeable about foreign affairs (79%). They tended to disagree that he was involved in the campaign for personal gain (63%) or that his campaign was the most well organized (49%). Only their perception of the quality of his organization appeared to change between February and April.

CANDIDATE APPEAL:

Two items measured respondent perceptions of the nature of Jackson's appeal, or the reality of his claim to be part of a "Rainbow Coalition". Fifty-five percent disagreed with the statement that Jackson that appealed primarily to the black electorate, and this perception did not change measurably during the two months in which the results of primaries were available. However, 62% of the respondents did agree in February that Jackson's support came primarily from the "grass roots", and this proportion increased by 8% by April ($t = 2.13$, $p = .034$).

CAMPAIGN ISSUES:

There were no significant changes in any perceptions of Jackson's positions on four campaign issues. Fifty-four percent of the respondents in February agreed that Jackson had a progressive position with regard to women's rights, but a sizeable proportion (40%) were unsure of his position. Twenty-five percent agreed that he took a conservative position regarding the environment, but more than half of the respondents were unsure of hi position. Similar proportions of respondents who were unsure were observed for Jackson's position with regard to business (63%) and communism (50%).

PRESS COVERAGE:

In the face of frequent complaints from the candidate, and the widely discussed case of a breach of tradition regarding reporting "off the record" comments where Jackson was reported to have referred to Jews as "Hymie" and New York City as "Hymietown", there was a dramatic change i. respondent perceptions of press treatment. Where 60% disagreed that Jackson was treated fairly by the press in February, more than 83.1% disagreed with that statement in April ($t = 7.23$, $p = .000$).

THE SOURCE OF PERCEPTIONS:

Table Two presents estimates of the relationship between media use, respondent interest in politics, their involvement in the Jackson campaign, and their perceptions of that campaign. For the purposes of this intial investigation, the more powerful Pearson's r was selected over non-parametric alternatives.

Self descriptions of respondent newspaper reading was generally unrelated to perceptions of the candidate, candidate positions, or the candidate's treatment by the press. The coefficients in Table Two may be intrepreted to mean that the heavier a respondent's use of newspapers,

the more likely they are to agree that Jackson has the most progressive position toward women's rights, and to disagree that he favors tax relief for business. Newspaper readers tend also to agree that Jackson is articulate. However, it is important to note at this point that none of these relations remain significant when measured in the April survey.

Television newsviewing appears to be somewhat more important as a source of perceptions of the Jackson campaign. The coefficients may be interpreted to suggest that the more heavily respondents engage in television newsviewing, the more likely they were to agree that Jackson was the most honest, intelligent and knowledgeable about foreign affairs. With the exception of the intelligence perception, these relationships remained in April as well. Only a single issue, Jackson's position regarding women's rights, appeared to be related to the use of television news, and the strength of this relationship declined by April.

Reported interest in politics was seen to be related to six more perceptions than were seen to be related to television newsviewing. The strongest correlations were seen with perceptions of candidate positions on issues. The coefficients may be interpreted to suggest that the greater a respondent's interest in politics, the more likely they are to disagree that Jackson favors tax benefits for business, or that he holds a conservative position on environmental issues. However, it is only in the case of perceptions of Jackson's position regarding business that the relationship remains stable between February and April.

It is the respondents' reported involvement in the Jesse Jackson campaign that emerges as the most important, and most stable indicator of their perceptions of the campaign. Only perceptions of Jackson's motives and his relative independence reveal no significant association with involvement in the campaign. With few exceptions, the magnitude of the coefficients for these comparisons are greater than in any other case. As one might expect, involvement in the campaign is related to perceptions

of the campaign organization. The more involved the respondents are in the campaign, the more likely they are to agree that the Jackson campaign is the most well organized. In no case are the signs of the coefficients different from other significant measures, or from those one would expect given actual knowledge of the Campaign.

DISCUSSION

This preliminary analysis had revealed several interesting, and perhaps surprising dimensions of the student political agenda on a predominantly black campus. Interest in the Jackson campaign is high. Attitudes toward the candidate appear not to have been rigidly predetermined on the basis of student identification with an articulate, attractive black candidate. Instead, our data reveal several perceptions of the candidate and the campaign which have apparently changed over the course of the early parts of the campaign. Overall, the direction of the change was toward even greater liking for and more positive evaluation of the candidate.

We found considerable uncertainty about Jackson's position on four campaign issues, and this uncertainty was not generally reduced during the primary election period. This may explain, in part, why we were unable to find any relationship between media use and the acceptance or rejection of propositions regarding Jackson's position on these issues. The significant changes observed in student perceptions of the candidate between February and April may be a reflection of the frequently observed tendency of the press to focus on candidate style rather than the issues. More conclusive interpretations will have to await completion of a content analysis of the Washington Post and television news coverage of the campaign during this period.

Similarly, we will have to await that data in order to draw more confident conclusions about some of the contradictory findings we have reported. For

example, we note that the direction of change in perceptions of Jesse Jackson are uniformly positive. That is, Jackson was more likely to have been seen as honest, intelligent, organized, experienced and independent in April than he was in Februray. At the same time the greatest change in perceptions was a change in the student's view of press performance. The students were significantly less willing to describe press treatment of Jackson as fair in April than they were in February. Should an unfair press be expected to provide the kind of information which would produce a net gain in candidate appeal?

The relatively low coefficients overall, and especially those for relations between media use and campaign perceptions underscores the diversity of influences on our understanding of political realities. While the literature on political cognitions, and on information holding in general suggest that greater learning is associated with use of print media, the relative importance of television news for this population should not be intrepreted hastily. It should be noted that in those limited instances where television news viewing does appear to be associated with the formation of political views, these views are limited almost entirely to candidate style rather than substance. It may be the case as has been suggested by others, that the limits of the medium result in even greater attention to "fluff" than is characteristics of the press in general.

The relatively high correlations between campaign perceptions and student interest in politics provides little insight into the process through which perceptions of political campaigns are developed. Future analyses will attempt to identify the paths through which interest moves toward the development of particular perceptions of a campaign.

Quite understandably, involvement in the Jackson campaign provides the most direct path to knowledge of not only candidate style, but also of the candidate's positions on specific issues and proposals. The relative stability of the coefficients suggests that the influence of involvement did not change as events in the political environment changed from day to day. Whether involvement serves to modify the mediating effect of television and newspaper use has not been addressed at this stage of our analysis, but we have no reason to believe that these forces are independent of each other.

We believe this study of the young black electorate will make a significant contribution to our understanding of the role of media in the political process. While it will address questions about the agenda setting hypotheses in particular, its consideration of the ethnic and cultural basis for the resistance of some beliefs to media-induced change will be worthy of specific note in the future.

TABLE ONE

Perceptions of the Jesse Jackson Campaign (Means)

Perceptions	February	April	t = Score
Black Appeal	3.24	3.20	.35
Honesty	2.33	2.22	1.35
Personal Benefit	3.66	3.82	-1.41
Organized	2.50	2.29	2.34*
Intelligent	2.62	2.25	4.25***
Grassroots	2.33	2.14	2.13*
Experienced	3.80	3.50	3.22***
Pro-Women	2.31	2.31	.08
Anti-Environment	2.92	2.87	.74
Independent	2.29	2.05	2.83**
Pro-Business	3.12	3.10	.31
Pro-Communist	3.31	3.35	-.46
Articulate	1.95	1.88	.81
Fair Press	3.48	4.23	-7.23***
Foreign Affairs Knowledge	1.87	1.85	.43

*$p \leq .05$
**$p \leq .01$
***$p \leq .001$

TABLE TWO

Relations between Media Use, Interest, Involvement and Perceptions of the Jackson Campaign (Pearson's R,)

Perceptions		Newspaper Reading	TV News Viewing	Interest in Politics	Involvement in Campaign
Appeal Limited to Blacks	F	-.07	-.02	-.09	-.17***
	A	-.12	-.09	-.07	-.11
Honesty	F	-.00	+.14**	+.13**	+.21***
	A	-.03	+.16*	+.10	+.20**
Personal Benefit	F	+.07	+.03	+.07	+.07
	A	+.06	+.07	+.15*	+.11
Organized	F	+.02	+.07	-.02	+.18
	A	+.02	+.11	+.04	+.20**
Intelligent	F	+.01	+.17***	+.14**	+.19***
	A	+.07	+.11	+.10	.00
Grassroots	F	.00	+.01	+.13	+.07
	A	+.03	+.11	+.10	.00
Experienced	F	+.03	+.12*	+.08	+.16**
	A	.00	+.12*	+.02	+.14*
Pro-Women	F	+.12*	+.19***	-.21***	-.24***
	A	.08	+.10	-.10	-.01
Anti-Environment	F	-.02	-.00	-.19***	-.19***
	A	+.03	+.07	-.10	+.01
Independent	F	-.01	-.05	-.01	+.07
	A	+.03	+.08	+.06	+.06
Pro-Business	F	-.10*	+.08	-.23***	-.14**
	A	+.05	+.04	-.18**	-.06
Pro-Communist	F	-.04	-.02	-.08	-.14**
	A	-.01	-.11	-.15*	-.00
Articulate	F	+.10*	+.07	+.15**	+.28***
	A	-.01	.00	-.08	-.11
Fair Press	F	-.06	-.04	-.15**	-.19***
	A	-.07	-.01	-.03	-.16*
Foreign Affairs	F	-.07	+.17**	+.09	+.18***
	A	+.03	+.18**	+.21**	+.17**

A = April
F = February

* = $p \leq .05$
** = $p \leq .01$
*** = $p \leq .001$

APPENDIX A
JACKSON CAMPAIGN STUDY

We would like you to assist us in our analysis of this data by providing the following items of personal information. Indicate the appropriate description by underlining a single response; or by filling in the blanks where appropriate.

Sex (male/female) Grade level (fresh/soph/junior/senior/other) Major Concentration _____

Registered voter (yes/no) Intend to vote in the November election (yes/no) Newspaper reading (none/light/medium/heavy)

Involvement in the Jackson campaign (none/light/medium/heavy) Level of interest in politics (none/light/medium/heavy)

Television news viewing (none/light/medium/heavy) Your daily newspaper(s)_____

Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements by placing one of the following sets of initials in the blank adjacent to each statement: AVS(agree very strongly), AS(agree somewhat), U (unsure), DS (disagree somewhat), DVS(disagree very strongly)

Jesse L. Jackson...

1. appeals only to black voters_____
2. is the most honest candidate_____
3. is in the campaign for personal economic and political benefits_____
4. is running a well-organized campaign_____
5. is the most intelligent candidate_____
6. gets his support primarily from the grass roots community_____
7. is the most experienced candidate_____
8. has the most progressive position on women's rights_____
9. takes a conservative position on environmental issues_____
10. is the most independent candidate _____
11. supports tax and regulatory relief for business_____
12. is soft on communism _____
13. is the most articulate candidate_____
14. is treated fairly by the press_____
15. is knowledgeable about foreign affairs_____

What do you feel is the most important thing in Jesse Jackson's favor_____

What do you feel is the most important thing standing in his way_____

What do you feel should be the most important consideration in selecting a presidental candidate_____

What do you see as the implications of this campaign effort_____

Any other personal comment on the campaign_____

NOTE

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